



Glacier National Park  
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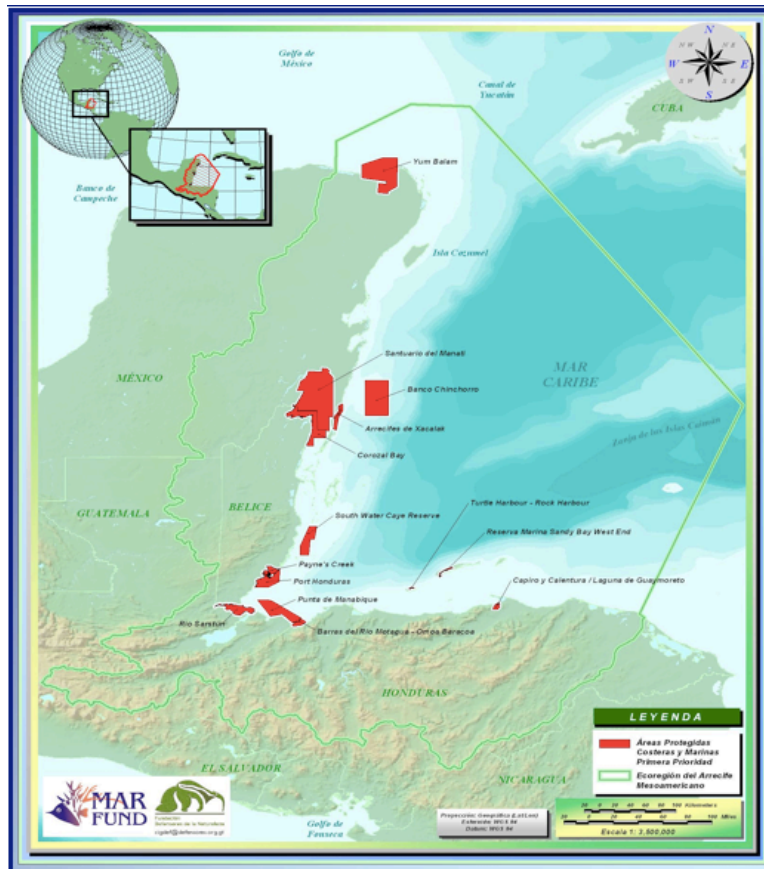


## Mesoamerican Reef Fund

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The Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) includes the watersheds that drain into the Caribbean of México, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras, as well as the marine area that contains the barrier reef, atolls and cayes, defined by currents. All of Belize is in the MAR.

Size: The ecoregion has a total surface of 457,490 km<sup>2</sup>.  
208,148 km<sup>2</sup> are terrestrial and 249,342 km<sup>2</sup> are marine.



Participants in coordinating the ongoing transboundary cooperation:

The MAR Fund was established by four pre-existing environmental funds, one each from each MAR country:

- Protected Areas Conservation Trust - PACT (Belize),
- Fundación para la Conservación de los Recursos Naturales y Ambiente en Guatemala - FCG,
- Fundación Biosfera (Honduras), and
- Fondo Mexicano para la Conservación de la Naturaleza - FMCN.

It operates as a privately managed fund that raises and allocates funds in collaboration with its four founding members. Of the four members, PACT is the only public fund; the other three are private.

In each country, MAR Fund collaborates with and/or funds protected areas and fisheries authorities, protected area administrators, local and national NGOs, community-based organizations and academia. It also collaborates and works jointly with regional and international organizations. Two key regional initiatives MAR Fund works with closely are the Healthy Reefs for Healthy People Initiative and the MAR Leadership Program.

**Objectives:** The overall objective of the MAR Fund is to provide long-term dependable funding, collaborative planning and priority setting for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Mesoamerican Reef ecoregion.

**MAR Fund mission:** To enable innovative, transnational solutions to critical Mesoamerican reef issues through providing meaningful, long-term financial support and trustworthy reef management advice so that future generations can enjoy and benefit from a thriving reef system.

**Values and importance:** The MAR is the world's largest transboundary barrier reef spanning over 1,000 km of coast and shared by Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras. It is the largest coral reef in the Atlantic, and home to an astonishing array of over 500 known fish species, some of the largest remaining population of manatees and sea turtles, possibly the largest known aggregation of whale sharks, and valuable concentrations of mangroves, sea grass, and coral, of which there are 66 species of spiny coral alone. Its coastal and marine habitats provide breeding, nesting, and foraging grounds for many species.

Between one and two million people live along the coasts and islands of the MAR region, and their livelihoods depend on the health of the reef. The MAR is culturally diverse, including Miskito, Garifuna, Caribbean Creole, K'ekchi, Mopan, Yucateco Maya, and Mestizo peoples.

**Aspects of transboundary cooperation:** The centerpiece of MAR Fund's work is the establishment and strengthening of a functional network of priority coastal and marine

protected areas in the MAR Region. In these areas, the MAR Fund supports and promotes: adaptation to climate change; conservation and restoration of natural resources and ecological processes; ecosystem services; and sustainable use of resources. If managed properly, such a network will secure fish stocks, habitats, spawning sites, water/forest resources, and recreational and development opportunities for the region's people.

MAR Fund is currently focused on a network of 14 priority coastal and marine protected areas distributed among the four countries in the region. By defining priority sites at the country level, and then articulating them regionally, MAR Fund can allocate financial resources effectively to the top- priority needs of the areas and the region.

**Stage in the process:** MAR Fund is operational. It provides funding to strategic initiatives through different channels, such as its Small Grants Program, revenues from its endowment, specific projects and initiatives and through the administration of third-party programs.

**Date Established:** February 12, 2004. The MAR Fund is a 501 (c ) (3) not-for-profit corporation registered in 2004 in Delaware, USA.

**Official Protected Area Designation:** The 14 priority coastal and marine protected areas that MAR Fund is currently focused on have different management categories, including: Marine Reserve, Wildlife Refuge, Special Marine Protection Zone, National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary, Multiple Use Area, among others. Some of these categories are specific to each country.

In Mexico, one of the priority sites is the Banco Chinchorro Biosphere Reserve, recognized by UNESCO. In Belize, we support the South Water Caye Marine Reserve, which is one of the seven marine reserves in their World Heritage site.

**The Catalyst:** In 2002, the then Director of WWF for Central America –which had been working in the region for several years- visited an environmental fund in each of the four Mesoamerican Reef countries to discuss the idea of a long-term financial mechanism to support conservation in the ecoregion. The four funds endorsed and adopted the idea immediately. It made perfect sense to join efforts between already operating funds to focus on the region. The four founding funds embarked on the creation of the regional environmental fund, backed by WWF, TNC, and the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Environmental Funds (RedLAC), which had for several years discussed the idea of funds working together across borders.

As a result of WWF's initial visit and motivation, the four founders established a mechanism to fund and coordinate sustainable long-term conservation actions in the MAR. This alliance was established with the vision of working towards a healthy reef system than can provide resources in a sustainable manner to the communities and countries that depend on them for their livelihoods and development.

**History:** WWF's initial idea of establishing a long-term financial mechanism for the MAR region was the key starting point. The positive response and leadership of the four founding pre-existing funds were the engine that moved the initiative forward and enabled the creation of the MAR Fund. WWF and TNC provided valuable financial support and critical legal and technical advice for the design and establishment of the fund.

**Barriers, challenges, obstacles, or constraints:** Contrary to many other environmental funds, the MAR Fund was not created with a capital to support its operation and programs. It had the energy and commitment of the four founding members, and was on its own. Fundraising was one of its initial concerns, and thanks to the trust and kind contributions of the Summit Foundation, it was able to begin operations. Other early donors followed, such as Oak Foundation, Marisla Foundation, Ocean Foundation, Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation, The Henry Foundation and WWF, which all helped the MAR Fund develop a solid structure and initiate its programmatic activities.

Fundraising continues to be a main pillar of MAR Fund's work. It is critical to provide dependable funding to the stakeholders developing important work in the region. MAR Fund currently has also other important donors, of which the German Cooperation through KfW has been instrumental in establishing and growing the endowment, among other contributions. However, it continuously searches for new sources of funding for the MAR.

### **The Governance and Management Structures**

- **Cooperative relationship:** The four founding members established the fund through a Certificate of Incorporation registered in Delaware and operate as per the approved bylaws.
- **Legal basis for cooperation:** An agreement to establish de Mesoamerican Reef Fund, signed by the four founding members, with WWF and TNC as witnesses.
- **Governance structure:** Board of Directors, with a maximum of 17 members. Approves strategic directions, projects to be undertaken, projects to be funded, strategic-level plans, policies, guidelines and procedures, among others. Supported by a series of advisory committees.
- **Cooperative management arrangement:** Strategic plan and general annual work plans. Some initiatives require general operating plans and specific annual work plans.

**Results:** MAR Fund has formed strategic alliances with conservation actors in the region and convened key conservation efforts. It has provided support for and participated in establishing regional partnerships, such as the Connectivity Network, the Reef Restoration Network, and the Lionfish Working Group. It is also a partner in the innovative Healthy Reefs Initiative that measures and tracks coral reef health in the region and the MAR Leadership Program that strengthens the capacities and leadership skills of young conservationists in the MAR countries.

Through different programs, MAR Fund provides strategic, technical and financial support for planning, managing, and optimizing the hard work performed by protected area managers, other partners, and communities involved in the region's conservation efforts.

It has been successful in mobilizing resources, including 23 million dollars in endowment funds and 17.2 million in sinking funds.

**Lessons Learned:** Establishing good working relations and trust with and among different stakeholders in and beyond the MAR region has been critical to the MAR Fund operation and permanence. These relationships have been established with local communities, academia, NGOs (local and international), different Ministries and other governmental offices. MAR Fund knows the people and has been able to establish personal relations, learning about the issues they are working on, their successes, their needs and the problems they may be facing at different points in time. Accountability at all levels: with donors and grantees has been instrumental. At the internal level, MAR Fund has recognized that it needs to continue evolving as a financial mechanism, to innovate, to become more efficient and to attract additional funds for the MAR region. In consequence, the Board is in the process of reviewing and modifying its bylaws, structure, and procedures in an effort to streamline governance.

### For More Information

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Attached, please find the following:

- Map of the Mesoamerican Reef region, including the 14 priority protected areas
- MAR Fund fact sheet
- Infographic on the Mesoamerican Reef System
- MAR Fund 2014 Annual Report
- Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pN2Cq7oXuE>